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## The rain quit on us

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By John Zambenini  
September 26, 2008



David Burklow, 77, holds dry soil from his backyard garden on Carla Court. Burklow has gardened since the 1960s and said he has never seen it so dry.

Franklin County's lack of significant rainfall this summer " part of a drought officials say the Bluegrass is experiencing " is taking its toll on farms and gardens.

According to Keenan R. Bishop, the University of Kentucky's extension agent for agriculture and natural resources, the region is about 4 inches behind on rainfall.

"We're in a drought," Bishop said. "We had it last year of course. We thought with abundant rains this spring we were out of that, but the rain quit in July and we haven't seen any since."

Bishop said the drought is mild by official standards, but poor rainfall last year is making things even tougher.

"We can live through a year, but this is two years back to back," Bishop said.

However, some crops have done well in spite of the dry season, Bishop said. Early tobacco did well, though the crop planted later has struggled.

As for corn in Franklin County, Bishop said, things haven't gone as poorly.

"It's done surprisingly well for our county," Bishop said. But, "it's been a one-two punch where early corn did well, but Ike came through and tore it up pretty bad. It weathered the drought but not the hurricane."

Bigger problems though, arise from livestock pastures, Bishop said. Some farmers, Bishop said, are "grazing pastures down to nothing again."

Many sowed alfalfa or clover as a food for grazing animals only to have it fail, Bishop said.

"There wasn't enough moisture in the fall to reseed pastures," Bishop said. "Some took a chance in planting hay. It's all withered up again."

The good news: there isn't much, Bishop said, but he believes most farmers have enough hay to get livestock through the winter and many are already feeding hay.

"Normally you can wait until November to start on that," Bishop said.

Bishop said the outlook isn't completely bleak. "This is all cycles," Bishop said. "You need to be a good enough manager to weather the tough cycles."

Also, some farmers have planted warm season grasses that are native to the state, Bishop said, though it takes two to three years to mature.

The warm season grasses like little blue stem, Indian grass and switch grass, Bishop said, can't handle repeated grazing.

But it can be a good way to hedge bets against a "summer slump" experienced by other

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grasses, like fescue.

"Any farmer or livestock manager that had it out this year would extol its virtues," Bishop said.

The season also has been tough for area gardeners.

Dave Burklow, 77, a retired State Police officer, has lived at his West Frankfort home since 1960 and planted a garden every year.

Burklow put his garden to rest this week after what he said was the toughest time he's seen in the nearly 50 years of planting the garden.

"This is the driest year we've ever had," Burklow said.

Burklow said he tilled the ground and went down at least 8 inches and found no moisture.

"We're having a good one," Burklow said of the drought.

His kale, cucumbers and green peppers did well he said, thanks to his watering, but green beans struggled.

According to Bishop, who is hopeful for future years, the dry season is taking its toll, but won't last forever.

"About all you have to look forward to is trying it again next year," he said.

**Ken Thompson**  
\*\*\*for\*\*\*  
**City Commissioner**

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2. Posted by JimiDee September 26, 2008

Welcome to global warming, folks. Unsettled weather patterns are a key indicator that we are firmly in its grasp. The intense storms are further indications that our climate is warming up, and human activity is the culprit.

The average rainfall numbers (behind 4") are deceiving because the rain is not coming regularly when we need it. Nearly every summer is dry to drought conditions and every winter is wet to flooding. That makes the average no change much but as far as having useful moisture in the ground for our plants, trees, yard, birds and other wildlife, it just is not there.

The kicker is that we had better get used to as our climate is turning this place into a desert in the summer. Benson Creek has been dry since July except for isolated springs that feed short sections before it disappears into the rocks. Elkhorn is running but it is artificially fed by the effluent from sewage treatment plants from Lexington and Georgetown...ewe!

Have another baby...that is what we need more of.

1. Posted by adminsj September 26, 2008

test

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